

CALIFORNIA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

721 Capitol Mall; P.O. Box 944272
Sacramento, CA 94244-2720



Highlights from the State Board of Education

*A monthly summary of key actions taken by the SBE
June 2001*

High School Exit Exam Passing Scores Set

The State Board of Education on June 7 approved passing scores for the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE), a key element in the state's effort to lift expectations for all students and to achieve sustained classroom achievement. The Board adopted the recommendation by State Superintendent of Public Instruction Delaine Eastin to establish a passing score of 60 percent correct for English-language arts and 55 percent correct for math. The motion passed by a unanimous vote of members present. The adoption was based, among other things, on a variety of extensive evaluations and recommendations made by panels of reviewers that included parents, educators, and businesspersons.

The CAHSEE consists of English-language arts and math tests designed to assess whether high school students have mastered a basic set of skills to participate fully in civic life and to succeed in the workplace. Under current law, starting with the high school class of 2004, students must pass the exit exam -- in addition to meeting other criteria -- to get a high school diploma.

Board President Reed Hastings said during the Board meeting that the CAHSEE is one of the hardest high school exit exams in the country. He also noted that the administration and the Board supported legislation that would have required all tenth graders to take the test next year to establish a full census of test takers. But that effort, embodied in SB 84, was defeated in the State Senate. The result was that a cohort of ninth-grade students were the first to take the test, doing so on a voluntary basis. Furthermore, the test results revealed a large achievement gap among California students -- with African American and Latino students scoring lower and Asian American and white students scoring higher. This gap is consistent across the scoring spectrum. In addition, the results also showed a significant gap in English-language arts, with female students scoring higher across-the-board than male students.

Board Executive Director John Mockler noted that Governor Davis and the Legislature are aware of the educational performance problems in the state and are addressing the problem with money for instructional materials, professional development programs, and a focus on standards-based instruction. Board Member Suzanne Tacheney stated that she wants the entire Board to commit itself to addressing the achievement gap, while fellow Board Member Carlton Jenkins expressed concern about the timeliness of reviewing test data. Board Member Susan Hammer said it should be kept in mind that content standards have only been in place for a few years -- since the current class of ninth-graders was in sixth grade. Board Member Don Fisher added that as schools improve, the passing score should be adjusted upward. For more information on the Board's adoption of passing scores for the CAHSEE, see the Passing Score Q&A at www.cde.ca.gov/board.

Schiff-Bustamante Waiver Policy Clarified

The Board unanimously approved modification of the Board's waiver policy regarding the Schiff-Bustamante Standards-Based Instructional Materials Program. In October 1999, the Board adopted a policy expressing its intent to deny requests to waive the requirement that Schiff-Bustamante funds be used only to purchase instructional materials that are aligned to content standards. In January 2001, the Board approved a limited exception for grade-level extensions of adopted reading-language arts materials. In February, the Board approved a second limited exception related to submitted but not adopted math materials; the exception is limited to schools currently using the materials. At its June meeting, the Board clarified the math waiver policy to make clear that requests for exceptions to this adoption policy must include complete achievement data. The waiver guidelines can be viewed in full at www.cde.ca.gov/cfir/schfbust.html.

Waivers for *Everyday Math*, *Open Court* Approved

Acting on requests by six different school districts, the Board approved waivers that will allow the *Everyday Mathematics* program and the *Open Court* reading program to be purchased with Schiff-Bustamante funds. Districts seeking and getting waiver approval to buy *Everyday Mathematics* were the following: Grass Valley School District (grades K-6); Hillsborough City Elementary School District (grades K-5); Pleasant Ridge Union School District (grades K-5); East Whittier City School District (grades K-5); and Glendale Unified School District (grades K-6). As a condition of approval, each district is to report to the CDE on the supplemental materials it will use to ensure complete coverage of content standards in grade five. Further, Glendale Unified is to report on student achievement after one year. Separately, Oakland Unified School District won approval to purchase the *Open Court* program for grades 4-5. The district is required to report on student achievement next year.

Information Items

DISTRICT API -- The Board received a California Department of Education (CDE) draft proposal for a district-level Academic Performance Index (API), a concept supported by several board members. For instance, Board Member Marion Joseph said that a district-level API would provide a way to hold school districts accountable for schools that underperform year after year. Board President Hastings suggested that the inputs for a district-level API reflect those now used for the school-level API. Further, he suggested that the number of schools without an API – and the number of students in those schools – be factored into a district's API. The CDE recommended that a district-level API be calculated on the basis of student-level data rather than school-level data. Hastings asked for CDE recommendation in July and stated he seeks continued input from school districts and educational organizations.

ADULT TESTING IRREGULARITIES – The Board engaged in a discussion on policy options related to adult testing irregularities on the API. CDE staff reported that the Technical Design Group came up with a few options: 1) ignore the testing irregularity and include student scores in the school's API; 2) delete the affected student scores; 3) assign a test score of zero or some other arbitrary score.

Superintendent Eastin suggested that the first option apply in cases in which the problem was self-reported, inadvertent, and had no material effect on student scores. Board Member Vicki Reynolds suggested immaterial be no more than one class; Board President Hastings suggested a percentage of students, such as less than 10% of one school's enrollment. Board Member Bob Abernathy said that whether something is inadvertent requires a judgment of what was in the mind of another person. Hastings asked the staff to develop and bring back a policy for Board discussion and action.

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